

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

DANYALE SHARRON TUBBS,

Petitioner,

Case No. 1:19-cv-19

v.

Honorable Robert J. Jonker

SHANE JACKSON,

Respondent.

/

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

This is a habeas corpus action brought by a state prisoner under 28 U.S.C. § 2254.

Promptly after the filing of a petition for habeas corpus, the Court must undertake a preliminary review of the petition to determine whether “it plainly appears from the face of the petition and any exhibits annexed to it that the petitioner is not entitled to relief in the district court.” Rule 4, Rules Governing § 2254 Cases; *see* 28 U.S.C. § 2243. If so, the petition must be summarily dismissed. Rule 4; *see Allen v. Perini*, 424 F.2d 134, 141 (6th Cir. 1970) (district court has the duty to “screen out” petitions that lack merit on their face). A dismissal under Rule 4 includes those petitions which raise legally frivolous claims, as well as those containing factual allegations that are palpably incredible or false. *Carson v. Burke*, 178 F.3d 434, 436-37 (6th Cir. 1999). The Court may *sua sponte* dismiss a habeas action as time-barred under 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d). *Day v. McDonough*, 547 U.S. 198, 209 (2006). After undertaking the review required by Rule 4, I conclude that the petition is barred by the one-year statute of limitations.

Discussion

I. Factual Allegations

Petitioner Danyale Sharron Tubbs is incarcerated with the Michigan Department of Corrections at the Earnest C. Brooks Correctional Facility (LRF) in Muskegon Heights, Michigan. Petitioner pleaded guilty in the Calhoun County Circuit Court to armed robbery, Mich. Comp. Laws § 750.259, and felony firearm, Mich. Comp. Laws § 750.227b. (Plea Tr., ECF No. 1-1, PageID.48-54.) On January 24, 2014, the court sentenced Petitioner to a prison term of 13 to 30 years on the armed robbery conviction to be served consecutively to a term of 2 years on the felony firearm conviction. (Sentencing Tr., ECF No. 1-1, PageID.76-78.)

On January 7, 2019, Petitioner filed his habeas corpus petition. Under Sixth Circuit precedent, the application is deemed filed when handed to prison authorities for mailing to the federal court. *Cook v. Stegall*, 295 F.3d 517, 521 (6th Cir. 2002). Petitioner placed his petition in the prison mailing system on January 7, 2019. (Pet., ECF No. 1, PageID.10.)

II. Statute of Limitations

Petitioner's application is barred by the one-year statute of limitations provided in 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(1), which became effective on April 24, 1996, as part of the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, Pub. L. No. 104-132, 110 Stat. 1214 (AEDPA). Section 2244(d)(1) provides:

(1) A 1-year period of limitation shall apply to an application for a writ of habeas corpus by a person in custody pursuant to the judgment of a State court. The limitation period shall run from the latest of

(A) the date on which the judgment became final by the conclusion of direct review or the expiration of the time for seeking such review;

(B) the date on which the impediment to filing an application created by State action in violation of the Constitution or laws of the United States is removed, if the applicant was prevented from filing by such State action;

(C) the date on which the constitutional right asserted was initially recognized by the Supreme Court, if the right has been newly recognized by the Supreme Court and made retroactively applicable to cases on collateral review; or

(D) the date on which the factual predicate of the claim or claims presented could have been discovered through the exercise of due diligence.

28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(1).

In most cases, § 2244(d)(1)(A) provides the operative date from which the one-year limitations period is measured. Under that provision, the one-year limitations period runs from “the date on which the judgment became final by the conclusion of direct review or the expiration of the time for seeking such review.” 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(1)(A).

Petitioner was sentenced on January 24, 2014. He did not file a direct appeal of his conviction to either the Michigan Court of Appeals or the Michigan Supreme Court. (Pet., ECF No. 1, PageID.2.) Where a petitioner has failed to properly pursue an avenue of appellate review available to him, the time for seeking review at that level is counted under § 2244(d)(1)(A). *See* 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(1)(A) (time for filing a petition pursuant to § 2254 runs from “the date on which the judgment became final by the conclusion of direct review *or the expiration of time for seeking such review.*”) (emphasis added). Petitioner had six months until July 24, 2014, in which to file a delayed application for leave to appeal in the Michigan Court of Appeals. *See* Mich. Ct. R. 7.205(G)(3).

Petitioner did not timely file a delayed application. Because he failed to file a timely appeal to the Michigan Court of Appeals, his conviction became final when his time for seeking review in that court expired. *See Williams v. Birkett*, 670 F.3d 729, 731 (6th Cir. 2012) (holding that a defendant’s conviction became final when the time for seeking review under Mich.

Ct. R. 7.205(F)(3) expired); *see also Gonzalez v. Thaler*, 132 S. Ct. 641, 655 (2012) (holding that, because the Supreme Court can review only judgments of a state’s highest court, where a petitioner fails to seek review in the state’s highest court, the judgment becomes final when the petitioner’s time expires for seeking state-court review).

Petitioner had one year from July 24, 2014, to file his habeas application. Petitioner filed his application on January 7, 2019. Obviously, he filed more than one year after the period of limitations began to run. Thus, absent tolling, his application is time-barred.

The running of the statute of limitations is tolled when “a properly filed application for State post-conviction or other collateral review with respect to the pertinent judgment or claim is pending.” 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(2); *see also Duncan v. Walker*, 533 U.S. 167, 181-82 (2001) (limiting the tolling provision to only State, and not Federal, processes); *Artuz v. Bennett*, 531 U.S. 4, 8 (2000) (defining “properly filed”).

Petitioner filed such an application, in the form of a motion for relief from judgment, on March 7, 2017. In that motion, Petitioner raised the same issues he raises in this Court. The trial court denied Petitioner’s motion by order entered April 7, 2017. (Pet., ECF No. 1, PageID.3.) Petitioner filed an application for leave to appeal in the Michigan Court of Appeals. (*Id.*) That court denied leave by order entered September 20, 2017. (*Id.*) Petitioner then sought leave to appeal in the Michigan Supreme Court. (*Id.*) The supreme court denied leave by order entered May 29, 2018. (*Id.*)

Petitioner then filed a petition for writ of certiorari in the United States Supreme Court. (*Id.*) The Court denied the petition by order entered October 29, 2018. (*Id.*, PageID.4.) The statute is not tolled during the time that a Petitioner petitions for writ of certiorari in the United States Supreme Court. *Lawrence v. Florida*, 549 U.S. 327, 332 (2007). As a result, Petitioner’s

motion only could have tolled the running of the statutory period of limitation from March 7, 2017, to May 29, 2018. Although 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(2) provides that the one-year statute of limitations is tolled while a duly filed petition for state collateral review is pending, the tolling provision does not “revive” the limitations period (i.e., restart the clock); it can only serve to pause a clock that has not yet fully run. *Payton v. Brigano*, 256 F.3d 405, 408 (6th Cir. 2001). Once the limitations period is expired, collateral petitions can no longer serve to avoid a statute of limitations. *Id.*; *McClelland v. Sherman*, 329 F.3d 490, 493 (6th Cir. 2003). Even where the post-conviction motion raises a claim of ineffective assistance of counsel, the filing of the motion for relief from judgment does not revive the statute of limitations. See *Allen v. Yukins*, 366 F.3d 396, 401 (6th Cir. 2004) (citing *McClelland*, 329 F.3d at 490). Because Petitioner’s one-year period expired in 2015, his collateral motion filed in 2017 did not serve to revive the limitations period.

The one-year limitations period applicable to § 2254 is a statute of limitations subject to equitable tolling. See *Holland v. Florida*, 560 U.S. 631, 645 (2010); *Akrawi v. Booker*, 572 F.3d 252, 260 (6th Cir. 2009); *Keenan v. Bagley*, 400 F.3d 417, 420 (6th Cir. 2005). A petitioner bears the burden of showing that he is entitled to equitable tolling. See *Keenan*, 400 F.3d at 420; *Allen v. Yukins*, 366 F.3d 396, 401 (6th Cir. 2004). The Sixth Circuit repeatedly has cautioned that equitable tolling should be applied “sparingly” by this Court. See, e.g., *Hall v. Warden, Lebanon Corr. Inst.*, 662 F.3d 745, 749 (6th Cir. 2011); *Robertson v. Simpson*, 624 F.3d 781, 784 (6th Cir. 2010); *Sherwood v. Prelesnik*, 579 F.3d 581, 588 (6th Cir. 2009). A petitioner seeking equitable tolling of the habeas statute of limitations has the burden of establishing two elements: “(1) that he has been pursuing his rights diligently, and (2) that some extraordinary circumstance stood in his way.” *Holland*, 560 U.S. at 649 (citing *Pace v. DiGuglielmo*, 544 U.S.

408, 418 (2005)); *Lawrence v. Florida*, 549 U.S. 327, 335 (2007); *Hall*, 662 F.3d at 750; *Akrawi*, 572 F.3d at 260.

The fact that Petitioner is untrained in the law, was proceeding without a lawyer, or may have been unaware of the statute of limitations for a certain period does not warrant tolling. *See Allen*, 366 F.3d at 403-04; *see also Craig v. White*, 227 F. App'x 480, 482 (6th Cir. 2007); *Harvey v. Jones*, 179 F. App'x 294, 299-300 (6th Cir. 2006); *Martin v. Hurley*, 150 F. App'x 513, 516 (6th Cir. 2005); *Fisher v. Johnson*, 174 F.3d 710, 714 (5th Cir. 1999) (“[I]gnorance of the law, even for an incarcerated *pro se* petitioner, generally does not excuse [late] filing.”).

Petitioner indicates that he suffers from mental health disorders. In *Ata v. Scutt*, 662 F.3d 736, 741-42 (6th Cir. 2011), the Sixth Circuit held that mental incompetence may be an extraordinary circumstance within the meaning of *Holland*. To prove mental incompetence that would toll the statute of limitations, a petitioner must demonstrate that (1) he is mentally incompetent, and (2) his incompetence caused his failure to comply with the AEDPA statute of limitations. *Id.* at 742. “[A] blanket assertion of mental incompetence is insufficient to toll the statute of limitations. Rather, a causal link between the mental condition and untimely filing is required.” *Ata*, 662 F.3d at 742.

Petitioner argues that his mental disorders, or the treatments for those disorders, may have rendered him incompetent to commit the crimes, enter a plea, or understand the proceedings. Petitioner’s argument does not suggest that the period of incompetence continued indefinitely during his incarceration. To the contrary, Petitioner recognizes that his “mental health treatment by the MDOC health care staff and medication adjustments have helped [him] to be more stable and able to function properly.” (Pet’r’s Aff., ECF No. 1-1, PageID.75.)

Petitioner's improved mental health is demonstrated by the fact he was able to procure his plea and sentencing transcripts from the trial court in 2014 (Calhoun Cty. Cir. Ct. Docket Sheet, ECF No. 1-1, PageID.16-17), and an affidavit from his sister in 2016 (Aff. of Tenaya Tubbs, ECF No. 1-1, PageID.74), and that he was able to file, pro per, the motion for relief from judgment and subsequent appeals in 2017 and 2018 (Pet'r's Aff., ECF No. 1-1, PageID75; Pet'r's Offer of Proof, ECF No. 1-1, PageID.55-57; Pet'r's Appl. for Leave to Appeal, ECF No 1-1, PageID.18-35). "The exceptional circumstances that would justify equitable tolling on the basis of mental incapacity are not present when the party who seeks the tolling has been able to pursue his or her legal claims during the period of his or her alleged mental incapacity." *Brown v. McKee*, 232 F. Supp. 2d 761, 768 (E.D. Mich. 2002). *See also, Herbst v. Cook*, 260 F.3d 1039, 1044 (9th Cir. 2001) ("We will permit equitable tolling of AEDPA's limitations period only if extraordinary circumstances beyond a prisoner's control make it impossible to file a petition on time" (citation and internal quotation marks omitted) (emphasis added)); *Biester v. Midwest Health Serv., Inc.*, 77 F.3d 1264, 1268 (10th Cir. 1996) (finding equitable tolling inappropriate where the evidence demonstrated the plaintiff's ability to file his claim, in spite of his mental condition); *Lopez v. Citibank, N.A.*, 808 F.2d 905, 907 (1st Cir. 1987) (same). By seeking and obtaining help in completing legal paperwork, during the limitations period, a petitioner fails to satisfy this burden. *See Price*, 119 F. App'x at 727; *see also Watkins v. DeAngelo*, 854 F.3d 846, 852 (6th Cir. 2017) (holding that assertion of existing mental illness during the period of limitations does not demonstrate that the illness caused the delay in filing, especially given that the petitioner filed two timely motions in state court). Accordingly, Petitioner is not entitled to equitable tolling of the statute of limitations.

In *McQuiggin v. Perkins*, 569 U.S. 383, 391-93 (2013), the Supreme Court held that a habeas petitioner who can show actual innocence under the rigorous standard of *Schlup v. Delo*, 513 U.S. 298 (1995), is excused from the procedural bar of the statute of limitations under the miscarriage-of-justice exception. In order to make a showing of actual innocence under *Schlup*, a Petitioner must present new evidence showing that “it is more likely than not that no reasonable juror would have convicted [the petitioner].” *McQuiggin*, 569 U.S. at 399 (quoting *Schlup*, 513 U.S. at 329 (addressing actual innocence as an exception to procedural default)). Because actual innocence provides an exception to the statute of limitations rather than a basis for equitable tolling, a petitioner who can make a showing of actual innocence need not demonstrate reasonable diligence in bringing his claim, though a court may consider the timing of the claim in determining the credibility of the evidence of actual innocence. *Id.* at 399-400.

In the instant case, although Petitioner may baldly claim that he is actually innocent, he proffers no new evidence of his innocence, much less evidence that makes it more likely than not that no reasonable jury would have convicted him. *Schlup*, 513 U.S. at 329. Because Petitioner has wholly failed to provide evidence of his actual innocence, he is not excused from the statute of limitations under 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(1). His habeas petition therefore is time-barred.

The Supreme Court has directed the District Court to give fair notice and an adequate opportunity to be heard before dismissal of a petition on statute of limitations grounds. *See Day*, 547 U.S. at 210. This report and recommendation shall therefore serve as notice that the District Court may dismiss Petitioner’s application for habeas corpus relief as time-barred. The opportunity to file objections to this report and recommendation constitutes Petitioner’s opportunity to be heard by the District Judge.

III. Certificate of appealability

Even though I have concluded that Petitioner's habeas petition should be denied, under 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(2), the Court must also determine whether a certificate of appealability should be granted. A certificate should issue if Petitioner has demonstrated a "substantial showing of a denial of a constitutional right." 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(2). The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals has disapproved issuance of blanket denials of a certificate of appealability. *Murphy v. Ohio*, 263 F.3d 466, 467 (6th Cir. 2001) (per curiam). Rather, the district court must "engage in a reasoned assessment of each claim" to determine whether a certificate is warranted. *Id.*

I have concluded that Petitioner's application is untimely and, thus, barred by the statute of limitations. Under *Slack v. McDaniel*, 529 U.S. 473, 484 (2000), when a habeas petition is denied on procedural grounds, a certificate of appealability may issue only "when the prisoner shows, at least, [1] that jurists of reason would find it debatable whether the petition states a valid claim of the denial of a constitutional right and [2] that jurists of reason would find it debatable whether the district court was correct in its procedural ruling." Both showings must be made to warrant the grant of a certificate. *Id.*

I find that reasonable jurists could not find it debatable whether Petitioner's application was timely. Therefore, I recommend that a certificate of appealability should be denied.

Recommended Disposition

For the foregoing reasons, I recommend that the habeas corpus petition be denied because it is barred by the one-year statute of limitations. I further recommend that a certificate of appealability be denied.

Dated: January 29, 2019

/s/ Ray Kent
United States Magistrate Judge

NOTICE TO PARTIES

Any objections to this Report and Recommendation must be filed and served within 14 days of service of this notice on you. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). All objections and responses to objections are governed by W.D. Mich. LCivR 72.3(b). Failure to file timely objections may constitute a waiver of any further right of appeal. *United States v. Walters*, 638 F.2d 947 (6th Cir. 1981); *see Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985).